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THE HEART OF HISTORIC SILVERTON

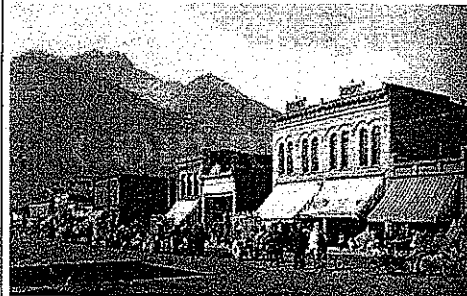
By Beverly Rich and Kathryn Retzler for San Juan Publishing
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SILVERTON IS A NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK. There are fewer than 2,500 in the United States and only twenty in Colorado. Silverton is considered one of the most intact historic towns in America. The main street, Greene Street, is named after George Greene, an early pioneer and city father. Mr. Greene brought the first smelter equipment into Baker's Park in 1874 and was instrumental in Silverton's development.

The Greene Street Landmark District is comprised of many elegant buildings. (See the Historic Walking Tour, pages 9-11 for detailed descriptions.) Most of them were built between 1882 and 1910, largely during Silverton's two early boom times. Silver ruled between 1882 and 1893 and miners flooded into the region, hoping to strike it rich. Tents, log cabins, and wooden structures popped up all over town and the surrounding mountainsides. Before long, as the town and the mines prospered, many of these structures were replaced by more permanent buildings. The arrival of the railroad in 1882 made it easier to haul in supplies and haul out ore for processing in Durango. The town blossomed.



Then, in 1893, the United States chose not to use silver any longer as the basis for its currency, resulting in the "Silver Panic." The value of silver plummeted, sounding a death knell to old-time subsistence mining. About that same time, however, electricity became available for mining. Its first use was in nearby Telluride, powered by the Ames Power Plant. Use of electricity meant less labor-intensive, more cost effective mining and the ability to go after the harder-to-reach ores. Gold was the new goal and, with the help of new technology, more easily extractable. As mining changed, so did Silverton, which continued to grow and become more established as a substantial town.



The local chapter of the Western Federation of Miners built the Miner's Union Hall in 1901. Home to various labor organizations, it was also the center of a bitter strike against mine owners in 1929. Union leaders met here, and after a fight, were escorted out of town for their own safety. The union was officially broken that day.

Across the street, Ye Old Livery was once a working livery run by the Silverton Transfer Company. Built in 1897, it featured an elevator to the second floor... The Grand Imperial Hotel was built in 1882. Its beautiful, ornate gingerbread makes it one of Silverton's flagship buildings. The hand-

carved rosewood bar with its diamond-dusted mirror (brought by ship from England) is still in place. At the opposite end of the block, the Posey and Wingate building, built in 1880, is the oldest commercial building in western Colorado and has been a hardware store, a bank, and a pool and billiards hall.

Directly across the street is the Benson Block, built in 1901. The corner space was occupied by the County Club, a saloon that had one of the most expensive bar fixtures ever imported to Silverton. The pink building next to it was the Exchange Livery, originally two stories high. Buggies and wagons were housed downstairs and horses upstairs. Next door, the Teller House, erected in 1896 by brewer Charles Fischer, housed two saloons — the Frog for the French and the Tyrol for the Italians.

Silverton Town Hall, with its silver bell tower, was erected in 1907. Fire almost completely destroyed it in 1991, but it was restored with painstaking care and won the National Honor Award from the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1996. At the north end of Greene is the San Juan County Courthouse, built in 1907 for \$79,000! It is still a working courthouse and has magnificent courtrooms on the second floor.

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Top right: Silverton, 1893. Ore wagons line up on Greene Street. Notice the wooden storefronts.

Bottom: Silverton, July 4, 1915. The wooden buildings have been replaced by substantial buildings, many of which still stand today. The Billy Cole building is in the foreground. (See walking tour for details.) Grand Imperial Hotel is just visible in the distance.

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(Don't even think about it!)